

THE
PRIMITIVE RULE OF GIVING
FOR
BENEVOLENT PURPOSES.

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PHILADELPHIA:
AMERICAN BAPTIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY,
118 ARCH STREET.
1851.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1851, by the
AMERICAN BAPTIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, in
and for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

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STEREOTYPED BY GEORGE CHARLES.

PRINTED BY KING & BAIRD.  
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EDITORIAL PREFACE.

It is a remarkable and hopeful feature of the times, that the attention of Christians of every name, is simultaneously turned to the necessity of the SCRIPTURAL SYSTEM, in providing funds for our acts of Benevolence.

In 1847, the Editor delivered an Address on this subject, at Richmond, Va., founded on 1 Cor. xvi. 2, in which, according to the notes now before him, he endeavored to show that the "NEW TESTAMENT ORDER requires Christian contributions to be, 1. Regular as the return of the Christian Sabbath; 2. Responsive to the calls of God in his Providence; 3. Rising higher in grateful proportion to our weekly Prosperity; and 4. Reduced to One Uniform System for all the Churches." At the time, and afterwards by letter from the Corresponding Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions, he was requested to write out his views for the press; but from various causes, failed to do so.

In 1850, The American Tract Society published three prize Essays on the same subject, from the pens of Rev. Parsons Cooke, Samuel Harris, and Edward A. Lawrence, all of Massachusetts, entitled respectively, "The Divine Law of Beneficence"—"The Mission of the Church, or Systematic Beneficence"—and "Zaccheus, or the Scriptural Plan of Benevolence." Recently Mr. Cooke's Essay has been abridged, and published as a tract. It is called "Religion and Beneficence, or the

System of Giving taught in the Holy Scriptures, with Illustrations." Extracts from these valuable works, will be found in the Appendix.

In August 1850, the Discourse on this subject, contained in this little volume, was delivered before the CUMBERLAND BAPTIST ASSOCIATION, held in Freeport, Maine, and printed in their Minutes by request. In justice to the Author it should be mentioned, that it was prepared several years before, and preached on several other occasions. So that it is, really *an original discussion*—showing the movement of the Holy Spirit on different minds, at one moment, in one direction, to revive "THE PRIMITIVE RULE OF GIVING FOR BENEVOLENT PURPOSES."

While all the works above named are excellent, and each has its own peculiar merit in some particulars; THIS one will be found distinguished for its evangelical simplicity, directness, brevity, and practical application. It is earnestly commended to all Christians, and Christian Churches. The times urge an immediate and universal attention to it. So does the MASTER'S voice from Heaven. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."

J. N. B.

THE PRIMITIVE RULE OF GIVING FOR BENEVOLENT PURPOSES.

CHAPTER I.

A RULE OF GIVING IS NEEDED.

UPON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, LET EVERY ONE OF YOU LAY BY HIM IN STORE, AS GOD HATH PROSPERED HIM, THAT THERE BE NO GATHERINGS WHEN I COME.—1 Corinthians, xvi. 2.

THIS is a rule, which, if generally carried out by Christians, would speedily effect a great revolution in the matter of doing good—a revolution that would usher in the brightest day the world has ever seen, of cheerful, vigorous, progressive, and successful, benevolent enterprise.

I take some things for granted respecting those to whom I specially address myself. I suppose you to love the Lord Jesus Christ. I suppose you to love his cause, and to pray daily—"Thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is done

in heaven." I suppose you to believe that God has very gracious designs towards this sin-stricken world, and that their glorious consummation—which he could at any time achieve by a mere volition, did he see fit—it is, in fact, his purpose to bring about by the agency of his people, on whom he has solemnly devolved the duty of keeping in wise, energetic, and constant employment, means suited to this end. I suppose you to be friendly to the various well-judged efforts which are making for the amelioration of our race, and often to ask—"Lord, what wilt thou have ME to do?" I suppose you to recognize no rank among Christians, exempt from the obligation of self-denial and cross-bearing, and to regard it as no less your duty, in your sphere, to labor for Christ than that of any one else in his. I suppose you to count yourself as belonging to him who bought you with his own precious blood. How the case stands is known to the Searcher of hearts. Alas, that concerning so many these suppositions will hold in hardly a single particular! Let such awake, before the Judge shall declare—"I never knew you!" But, there are not a few who feel that they are not their own; whose glory it is that they live only as Christ liveth in them; and whose earnest longing it is that they may approve themselves unto God as faithful stewards of his manifold grace.

And yet there is room for the suggestions I have to offer. Christians may be all that has been supposed, and yet be doing little, compared with what they ought to do, for the cause of Christ. It may be, they have never yet fallen on the BEST METHOD of doing, and this is the reason why they are doing so little. Perhaps a change in their mode of contributing would enable them to bring much larger offerings to the sacred treasury, and this with far greater ease and satisfaction than when they bestow their occasional offering.

Even in this age of extended benevolent operation, great deficiencies and neglects prevail. How lamentable the proof that the dictates of piety are not heeded in this matter by the great mass of the pious! Else, why is their activity so dependent on urgent solicitation and appeal? Why is there so much working at mere random, or by systems adopted at the merest caprice? Why so much waiting for the violent impulse of actually pressing exigencies? Were every thing as it ought to be, there could not fail to be vastly more of voluntary, independent, heart-prompted action. It would be nothing uncommon for Christians to fix deliberately on some plan by which to make the most of their resources for the glory of God. They would more generally of their own accord devise liberal things, and so execute their devices that what they do,

and all they can do, will be ready the instant it is needed. Christian beneficence would run like a thread, unbroken, and evenly interwoven through the whole texture of each individual life.

Surely, the Christian we have supposed will not deny—or doubt—that the Church is most sacredly bound to do, not only all she is now attempting for the good of the world, but much more. The conviction is irresistible in the minds of all who survey the world with the eyes of a truly intelligent piety, that the demand has little more than begun to be met, and that some method of developing the resources of the Church, more efficient than any hitherto followed, must be taken. Macedonian cries are borne on every breeze. Providence stands pointing to a thousand open doors. Something must be done—and done quickly. The Church cannot be true to her calling, without largely swelling and multiplying the streams of her charity.

Yet, with how much difficulty and importunity are her *present* operations sustained! How great the friction in the working of our benevolent organizations! How often are the Executive Boards of our various Societies brought to a stand, and forced to feel that it is but a feeble sympathy which binds to them, in the prosecution of their measures, the bodies they serve! Ought these things to be so? *Need such a state of things con-*

tinue? In fine, can any thing be more desirable than that some *system* of giving be adopted throughout the churches, which shall at once secure abundant means for plying vigorously every facility for doing good, characterize every benefaction as the cheerful offering of principle, and cause it to re-act on the donor with the blessing that the King of Zion designs shall crown every discreet and well-intended effort in his service.

CHAPTER II.

A RULE OF GIVING IS SUPPLIED IN SCRIPTURE.

SUCH a system it is my present object to unfold. I can lay no claim to novelty; but this I do not regret, since I am able to commend the plan to be brought forward, as *scriptural*. I may also add, it is exceedingly *simple* and *feasible*. It has no complicated, impracticable details. It was acted on by many of the disciples of Jesus eighteen centuries ago; and has, doubtless, to some extent, been followed by the benevolent in subsequent ages. It is to be feared, however, that the instances are wide apart in which it is adhered to at the present day, though a mere inspection of it is enough to show that a better cannot be framed, as might also be argued from the fact of its having an inspired Apostle for its author.

All the elements of this system are contained in the direction of the Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth, respecting collections for the needy saints in Judea. I refer to the passage:—"UPON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, LET EVERY ONE OF YOU LAY BY HIM IN STORE, AS GOD HATH PROSPERED

HIM, THAT THERE BE NO GATHERINGS WHEN I COME." 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

We learn from the verse preceding that the Apostle had given the same direction to the churches of Galatia. It is therefore probable, that the rule was extended to all the churches that were solicited to contribute for the same purpose. Whether it was the practice of the primitive Christians to lay by them in store for *all* their pious and benevolent objects on the first day of every week, we have not the means of determining. When we consider, however, the circumstances of believers in that early period, it appears most likely that there was little *opportunity* afforded, as a general thing, for *laying by* their benefactions. They were themselves on strictly missionary ground, subject to all the demands and embarrassments of such a position; and they could not, except occasionally, as in the case to which the rule specifically refers, have operated for the benefit of the distant. It was in their power to do but little beyond what was pressingly needed on the spot, and was appropriated as soon as it accrued. Bringing in promptly and disbursing without delay, must ordinarily, with them, have superseded laying by them in store. But, even as the case stood, it is hardly to be doubted that their benevolent contributions were made weekly on the

Lord's day, and that "every one" was expected to give "as God had prospered him."

Still, they did do for others beyond their own neighborhood, and where opportunities for forwarding their donations must have been unfrequent. Now observe: in the only case of this kind, of which we have particular information, they were instructed not to defer their preparation until these opportunities should offer, but lay by them in store *in anticipation* of these opportunities. Let us now suppose other cases similar to have arisen, in which they were called on to bestow for objects which could be reached only at intervals greater than a week; why would not the rule apply to these cases with full as much force as to the former? That is, why would not the rule apply in its full force to *every* case in which it was convenient only occasionally to convey their quotas to the general treasury? I confess I do not see. If the rule was the best one for its original purpose, why is it not the best for every purpose where funds are not to be appropriated on the spot, and as fast as they can be raised? It is difficult to conceive of a case of religious donation to which the rule may not be substantially, if not literally, applied.

I would not claim too much for this rule. I pretend not to say that the Apostle contemplated for it universality and perpetuity. I pretend not

to say that any anathema awaited those who did not practice it, even at Corinth. Still less would I say that it is at this day obligatory in such a sense as to render it a test of piety. But it was clearly the very best that could be followed by those to whom Paul sent it; and a better cannot be found to guide the pious and the philanthropic of the present day. In the name of God and of humanity, let all who love our Lord Jesus Christ adopt some system, by which they shall both do what they can, and do it the most effectually, for the promotion of the Gospel.

So thoroughly am I convinced that the primitive system is the very best possible, that I would fain induce every follower of Jesus to put it into immediate practice. What was there so peculiar in the business of relieving the poor saints at Jerusalem, that a special rule was needed to guide Christians in making up their contributions for that object more than for any other? And what so peculiar in that object as to require a rule different from what would be suited to collections for other benevolent purposes? And, with all the changes that eighteen hundred years have brought about in the circumstances of Christians, what peculiarity—I would emphatically ask—can be pointed out in the circumstances of believers in the first century, to render the rule a more useful one

for them than for us? Trace out the advantages of the rule as applied to the relief of the Christians of Judea; and then consider the nature and mode of the benevolent operations in modern times. What advantage can be discovered in the former case, which would not be realized in the application of the rule to the latter? Now, if this be so, what Bible Christian, really desirous of fulfilling his Master's will, can deliberately decline adopting this plan? Where is the Christian, who will either persist in refusing to act on *any* system, or think to improve on that of an inspired Apostle, without being able to show wherein some material modification of it is demanded?

CHAPTER III.

THE RULE REQUIRES US TO HAVE A SETTLED PLAN
OF GIVING.

BEFORE urging the claims of this rule, it may be well to give it a closer examination. It proposes :

1. We are to LAY BY US IN STORE.

We are to keep at hand a treasury of our own for the Lord. It may be a box, a drawer, a purse, an iron safe, or what we please, provided only it be *secure, accessible, inviolable, and not too far removed from the closet*. Into this we are from time to time to put our appropriations, to accumulate until convenient and suitable opportunities are afforded for applying them directly to the objects we design to aid. We are not to wait until occasions arise. We are not to postpone giving until 'the Agent' shall make his appearance. We should be ready, that there be no gatherings when he come. We are not to satisfy ourselves with being now and then surprised into liberality. We are not to substitute the feverish impulses of anniversary fervors for the constant and habitual practice of doing good. We are not to content ourselves with

doing *in a lump*, or merely what we may feel ourselves compelled to do in view of special emergencies. *We are to lay by us in store*; that thus we may have constantly on hand a SACRED DEPOSIT, from which we may at any time draw, and feel, as we contribute, that whether the amount be large or small, it is, at least, all that duty requires us at *this* time to give.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RULE REQUIRES US TO GIVE EVERY WEEK.

2. WE are to do this WEEKLY.

To some, the interval may seem very short. Many whose resources are quite limited, will fancy that they can do so little by the week as to make it hardly worth the while to deposit their contributions so often. Let such remember that *it is easier to give small sums frequently than large sums seldom*; and that *small sums, frequently given, soon make large ones*. The man who could lay by his half-dollar a week without feeling it, would probably, at the year's end, consider himself but very poorly able to contribute twenty-six dollars, without this weekly accumulation. Nor would he be likely to set apart two dollars by the month with equal facility. Beyond question, this same man, assessing himself by the year, would deem it extremely liberal in him to spare twelve dollars for religious purposes. It is certain, unless we give at short intervals, we shall neither give what we *can*, nor what we *ought*; and what we do give will be bestowed with comparatively little cheerfulness and convenience.

Another consideration is worthy of notice here. *The plan requires regularity.* To insure this, the intervals must be short. We hardly need be reminded of our constitution in this respect. We need not be told that if we leave our laying by to be done at *any* time, this step in the process of our beneficence will soon be omitted altogether. However we may still give, *when solicited*, we shall not long continue to *lay by* for the purpose. And it is quite as obvious that, unless our intervals of depositing be short, they will scarcely fail, through forgetfulness and neglect, to become exceedingly irregular, thus precluding the formation of any settled habit in the business, and frustrating the plan completely. Probably, in this point of view, no interval has more to be said in its favor than once a week. It is not so long that there need be any difficulty, through a failure of memory, in maintaining perfect regularity; it is not so short as to render the duty burdensome by its frequent recurrence.

This feature of the plan has yet another very weighty argument in its support. I refer to *the constancy of Christian obligations*. We are under obligation to be at all times doing what we can for Christ. It is no more our duty to levy on ourselves once or twice in the course of the year than every day in the year. So far as may be, every

day and every minute, should be made to do its own work. Considerations of economy and convenience will, however, sometimes suggest that particular times, separated from each other by greater or less intervals, be set apart for the actual addressing of ourselves to particular duties. Thus, it is our duty to "pray without ceasing." By this it is undoubtedly meant that we are at all times to maintain such a bent of the soul towards God, that we may with propriety be said to be always praying. Still, he who should never go and bend his body before the Lord, or should do this only once or twice a year, would probably possess but a meagre claim to the character of him who prays without ceasing. Because we are not to present our bodies every instant in the posture of devotion, it does not follow that we are to do this at no time, or but seldom. It is a point of duty which every one is to decide for himself, according to the best lights he can obtain—*how often* shall I worship and bow down before my Maker?

So in the matter of setting apart for the special service of God a portion of the gifts of Providence. Because God does not require us, whenever a sum of money comes into our hands, to proceed at once and separate from it the portion due to his cause, this does not prove that a long period may be allowed to pass without such an appropriation.

The question arises,—*how often* shall I attend to this business? and this question should be decided with all the wisdom we can command. In such an inquiry, it surely ought not to escape our notice that all we possess was bestowed by Him, “whose we are, and whom we serve;” so that our obligations to him are constant and perpetual. A sense of such obligations can never dictate that we present our offerings but seldom. It will dictate that this be done at as short intervals as the best economy on the one hand, and a proper use of our Christian freedom on the other, will admit. We shall be anxious to discharge every obligation as nearly as possible to the time in which it falls due. This is but sheer right. Besides, how forcibly should the monition ever come home to us—“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest.” Taking this view of the subject, how can one consider it too much that he is expected to lay by him a deposit for the Lord’s service—*weekly*?

CHAPTER V.

THE RULE REQUIRES THAT WE GIVE ON THE
LORD'S DAY.

3. THIS is to be done "ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK."

It is important that the day be fixed. Not that our little treasury is to be opened on no other day; but always, when practicable, on *that*. If the duty be left to any time in the week, many a week will pass away without its being done at all. It is hardly less important that the intervals be regular than that they be short. An important reason for their being short, is that they may be regular. I trust it will not be considered as pressing this point too far, if I suggest, that even the *time of day* be fixed. Precision powerfully contributes to the formation and the establishment of habit. A good habit cannot be too thoroughly confirmed. This potent principle, to which there is so strong a tendency in our nature, and which is itself the parent of such strong tendencies, may well be guarded. But its potency may be enlisted on the side of good as well as of evil. While it rivets on the wilful sinner the chains of a grovelling and

fatal servitude, it is intended to be no less an effectual helper of the child of God in attaining to all that constitutes his real freedom, and felicity, and glory. It sets a hedge on his right hand and on his left, to keep him in the straight and narrow path; but quite as truly does it bring him forth also into a large and wealthy place. Apply this to our rule. If it is a good one, it is a great point gained that the force of habit is on its side. Fixing, as it does, a day for its regular weekly observance, it contains in itself a provision for securing this important end.

A particular day is specified:—“THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK.” It is not difficult to conceive why this of all the seven should be selected. The first day is distinguished from all the rest as “the Lord’s Day”—the Holy Sabbath of the Christian Dispensation. It commemorates the finished work of Redemption. It tells us of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It calls us to cultivate a love like His. Precious day! how hallowed its associations! how elevating its duties! Then, if ever, does the Christian proclaim a truce to the cares and vanities of earth, and rise to the contemplation and appreciation of things unseen and eternal. Then is his heart open to the sweetest inspirations of Charity. Then is he reminded the most forcibly of his obligation to the Giver of all good. Then

is he prepared to feel the most deeply and effectually for the multitudes whose lot is so deplorably different from his own. As in the closet his soul rises on freed wing, or in the sanctuary expands under the genial influence of the means of grace, or in quiet meditation is suffused with an unction from the Holy One, let him turn his thoughts to the perishing millions—how many at his very door!—who never

——“Smiled when a Sabbath appeared;”

and then ask—“who hath made me to differ? and what have I that I have not received?” How much better at such a time is he fitted to do justice to the claims of humanity and religion than when borne onward upon the tide of business, eager for the accomplishment of his secular ends, and when every thing speaks to him of Time rather than Eternity—of Earth rather than Heaven!

And how natural that on the Sabbath *we should take a review* of all the way along which our God has led us, and especially of his dealings with us during the last week. How many the occasions for thanksgiving! How many the occasions for humiliation! How fit that I should make some grateful acknowledgment of his goodness and forbearance! How eagerly ought I to seize the opportunity he affords me of laying an offering upon his altar!

It is also justly to be presumed that at this transition point from one week to another, the generality of persons *know better than at any other time in the week how their affairs stand*. They are consequently better able at this time to judge what their circumstances will admit of their laying by. At least, this *ought* to be the case. There are few departments of business in which it will not be found of great service for a man to know on every Saturday night, as nearly as possible, how he stands with the world. To give, he is then often most able. Laborers, very often, are paid on that night.

And here also we may incidentally remark, that, were the plan to be generally adopted, we might reasonably anticipate *very happy results* to the secular interests of many; since a rigid practice on it could hardly fail to introduce habits of system and order into the management of business, well suited to render it more lucrative, and more safe. Should these results be realized in no other way, they would be by that judicious frugality and economy which the rule must inevitably promote.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RULE REQUIRES US TO GRADUATE OUR GIFTS
BY THE MEASURE OF GOD'S GIFTS TO US.

4. WE are to lay by us in store "AS GOD HATH PROSPERED" US.

Here we have the regulator of our weekly benefactions. What could be more equitable? According as every man hath, so it is required of him. And this refers to God's own gifts too. He does not meet us like a robber on the highway. He is not a despot, exacting what he had no agency in producing. It is because *He* prospers us that we have the means of giving. When the Giver of our blessings bestows more, he demands more; when less, less. Hence, probably, it will not be our duty to lay by the same amount on every Lord's day. Sometimes it may be but a mere mite; at other times, a considerable sum. Our receipts are greater in some weeks than in others. Our necessary expenditures will vary in different weeks. But we are required to give only in the proportion in which God has given. Accordingly, our aggregate circumstances at the time must govern the amount we lay by on each first day of the week.

Still, this proportion is not definite; and the question arises, *at what RATE shall I lay by?* At what per cent on my profits, income, or money in hand? It is worthy of remark that there would not be this indefiniteness about the rule, were it found in any other code but the Christian. Every rate under the Mosaic economy was determined and fixed; and no Jew could bestow less than one-fifth of his income without a palpable violation of the commands of Jehovah. But, “brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh.” The Christian is called to liberty; but to a liberty which requires caution in its use. It is not the liberty *to do nothing*. It is not a liberty that recognizes no law, or tolerates infractions of the divine commands. The believer belongs to a dispensation, the peculiarity of which is, that its code is written not only in the statute-book, but also in the hearts of its subjects; and is thus rendered the “perfect law of liberty.” For, acting in conformity with its dictates is, after all, substantially, but acting out the impulses of that regenerating principle which has made him a new creature in Christ Jesus. What is this but freedom? We act freely when we do what we choose. As the work of divine grace progresses in the heart of the believer, it becomes even more than his choice—it is his meat and drink—to do the will of God.

Thus is he made Jesus Christ's freeman; and, in the service of Christ, he is *treated as* a freeman. The details which would have to be included in a command issued to a slave are supposed not to be needed in his case. It is ordinarily enough that he be informed *what* his Lord would have him do. A minute, stringent specification of particulars in the mode of operation would but ill comport with the dignity of his high calling. Our Master deals with us as those, who, having learned the *end*, will be impelled by a force already existing within them, to search out faithfully the best means for its accomplishment, and employ those means to the best and the utmost of their ability.

Now, ask again,—at what rate shall I lay by? Let me put a question or two, that may help you to the answer. *Ought the rate to be less, than it would be had the Lord Jesus made an express enactment fixing it?* If you can form any idea as to what the rate would be, were *he* to fix it, ought you to set your standard below that? But you will not presume to say what Jesus would have enacted on this point. Still, can you do less, in deciding the matter, than inquire, “Lord, what wilt *thou* have me to do?” And determine that you will not settle on a rate which it is morally certain is less than your Saviour would have prescribed?

Consider this: *in not establishing the rate by law, he has given to his disciples a most signal proof of the confidence he reposes in them.* It is as much as to say—"I throw you upon your sense of honor and obligation in the matter. Freely ye have received, freely give. Ye know my grace towards you, that though I was rich, yet for your sakes I became poor, that ye through my poverty might be rich. I choose not to settle rates for those who owe me their own selves—who live only because I died—the purchase of my blood. Let their own hearts be the umpire. If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not."

Disciple of Jesus! shall your Master's confidence be justified? What requital ought you to make for such an honor? What must be the prompting of a truly noble piety? Shall the meagerness of your deposits demonstrate that his confidence is misplaced? Will you basely take advantage of a silence springing from your Saviour's disposition to have your offerings the voluntary tribute of love? Shall it be seen that *you* are to be held by no law which does not settle its details with such precision as to leave nothing for gratitude to interpret?

But still,—what shall be the rate? Since the great Head of the church has been pleased to

leave this undetermined, I shall not presume to dictate what it should be. It is doubtless best that each one be left to decide it for himself, as the measure of his own piety shall direct. You might be referred to what was demanded under the Old Dispensation—at least *one fifth*, a rate seldom equalled in these days even by those who pass for liberal Christians. Experience taught the Jew that he could not more effectually impoverish himself, than by robbing God in withholding the required offerings; or more truly secure his own good, than by faithfully bringing his tithes into the store-house. There need be no apprehension that the Christian, who should bestow to an equal extent, would find any more cause to regret his liberality. And who will deny that the Gospel is as well worthy of all that can be spent for it as Judaism?

The inquirer might also be referred to the example of believers in those purest and best days, when none of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, and they could even sell their houses and lands, and lay the proceeds at the Apostles' feet, so that the exigencies of the church might be met. But I do not insist on this. Let the Christian's own heart be his assessor.

The rate should be such as shall be *a real expression of gratitude to the Saviour, and of con-*

cern for his cause. Ought not the Christian to be willing to do what he will *feel*? How can he be said to deny himself in the service of Christ, who parts only with what, if taken without his knowledge, would never be missed? Ought we not to be willing even to make sacrifices for the promotion of the Gospel? Are we not under obligation to retrench our expenditures, and economize our resources, and ply our industry most vigorously, to enable us to do an honorable part in carrying forward the triumphs of the Cross? What shall be thought of the piety of that individual who bestows less on the enterprizes of Christian benevolence than he is accustomed to lavish on himself or his household, for the needless, or, more likely, the pernicious, luxuries in which so many indulge?

Let us observe *the incitements to liberality held out in the Scriptures.* What form of inculcation is wanting to impress the lesson that both duty and interest require a large and cheerful beneficence? I adduce only a single passage from each of the Testaments.

How striking a recognition of the principles involved in the subject do we find in the thanksgiving of David, when he blessed the Lord before all the congregation of Israel, on the occasion of bringing together their vast accumulations for building the Temple:—"Blessed be thou, Lord

God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory and the majesty; for *all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine*; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. *Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all*; and in thine hand is power and might, and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now, therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. *But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and* OF THINE OWN HAVE WE GIVEN THEE. For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers; our days on earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding." 1 Chron. xxix. 10-15. Let these sentiments sink into our hearts, and there is no danger but the *rate* will be settled right.

But a greater than David is here. Our Lord, knowing how formidable an obstacle to liberality is the fear of coming to want, exhorts his followers to refrain from all anxiety on this score, and, trusting in their Heavenly Father, let the morrow bear the burden of its own cares. He then proceeds directly to say—"Rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Sell that

ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags that wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Luke xii. 31, 33, 34. Consider well this language. It is scarcely possible for us, taking the Saviour at his word, to fall into mistake in concluding what portion of our resources shall be devoted to his service. But, were the Son of Man to come, would he find faith on the earth? Lord, increase our FAITH. Teach us thy will; for thou art our God.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RULE REQUIRES THIS COURSE FROM ALL,
WITHOUT EXCEPTION.

5. THE rule is FOR ALL. "LET EVERY ONE of you lay by him in store."

This is a very essential part of the plan, considered in its public bearing. What is more to be desired than that the *whole* church be brought up to duty? Vastly more would be accomplished, even under the existing order of things, than is, were *all*, who profess to be Christ's, to *do something*. How much more yet—incalculably more—were all to observe faithfully the Apostle's rule! The treasury of Christian benevolence would be overflowing. Very soon would Bibles, and Tracts, and the living Preacher, be found in every benighted corner of the world. And, did the faith, and humble prayers of the Church, keep pace with these operations, a long time could not elapse before the kingdoms of this world would become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.

Every friend of the Gospel ought to be reached and induced to adopt the rule. *Every* Christian,

I say; for the cases of those who are supported by charity, or who, by force of other circumstances, are positively unable to bestow any thing, are so few, compared with the whole body, and especially in this country, that they need not be taken into account. The Apostle made no exception in writing to the Corinthians; and yet, doubtless, there were not a few among the poverty-stricken and persecuted believers in that dissolute city, who had to struggle hard for their bread. But he knew too well that 'there is that scattereth, and yet increaseth;'—he knew too well the safety of trusting in the Lord and doing good, to deem it necessary to guard his order by any clause of exception. It may be laid down with hardly a reservation, that every one whose necessities do not make him a *receiver* ought to be a *giver*. (Why not let him give a portion of that he receives? She who gave most into the treasury of old, gave only two mites, but they were all her living!) Though able to afford but a cent a week, the mite should not be withheld. One cent a week is more than half a dollar a year; which will send seven hundred and fifty pages of Tracts, or eight Testaments, or two Bibles, on errands that shall make angels rejoice. Every sister should follow the rule as well as every brother; every youth as well as every adult. The wealthy believer, because he can at any time com-

mand the total of what he would be likely to lay by in a year, should not feel himself at liberty to deviate from a system which has so much to recommend it, and which may be retarded not a little in its general adoption by the want of his example. The poorer brother should not be deterred from making his appropriation every Lord's Day by the consideration of his having so little to lay by. The pastor should not esteem it enough that he earnestly inculcate on his people the duty of systematic beneficence, without adding to his persuasives the mighty energy of a corresponding practice

Let any one who has never entered into calculations on this subject, or witnessed the operation of the plan, take his pencil, and set down against the name of every member of his church the average of what he probably could, without inconvenience, lay by him in store on each Sabbath morning, and then add up the amount. He will be astonished to see how much his church might raise every week. Let him then multiply this amount by fifty-two, and he will be still more astonished to see what a sum might be made up in a year without any one being poorer for his giving. Let us suppose a church of two hundred members, and that the amount deposited by each member *averages* twenty-five cents a week. Taking all classes together,

there are few churches in which this average could be oppressive. We have for the result fifty dollars a week, or two thousand six hundred dollars a year. This is, doubtless, a much larger amount than is ordinarily raised in a year by churches of two hundred members; and I am confident I have not approached extravagance in this estimate. *Nothing but energy in introducing, and perseverance in establishing, the system, is needed to more than verify the above result.*

It is but just that every member of a church should bear his proportion in sustaining the operations of the body, both at home and abroad; and surely, equality, and harmony, and brotherly love, must most abound in that church where each one does his proportionate part. Why then are not the fragments more generally gathered up, that nothing be lost? It is not because the poorer members of the churches are less willing to do according to their means than the more wealthy. Is it because in the aggregate these small sums would not make a considerable amount? It is not to be doubted than in many instances the amount actually raised might be doubled by their being collected in. Is it because they would not compensate for the trouble of their collection? *The rule of the Apostle precisely meets this point.* Let the poorer brother be induced to lay by him in

store what he is able on each Lord's Day, and he will thus accumulate an amount which he will be encouraged to bring in *of his own accord*, as it may be called for.

No plan can lay claim to being perfect, which recognizes a necessity for the extensive employment of collectors. Every church should establish such an arrangement as will afford to its members opportunities at regular periods,—say monthly or quarterly,—to bring in *for themselves* their donations for particular objects. The year might be divided into portions, each having reference to some distinct department of the general field. Such an arrangement on the part of the churches in conjunction with the plan for weekly deposits by the members, in their individual capacity, would obviate to a great extent the necessity for much of the machinery now generally employed, and which is so generally found to be extremely difficult to keep in uniform and effective operation.

Of course it will be necessary for measures to be taken to keep the people in mind of the arrangement; and pastors may reasonably be expected to urge on their flocks the claims of the several objects which their churches may choose to assist. How does Paul himself press this subject in his second Epistle to the Corinthians! (See Chapters viii. and ix.) These chapters are models

of Christian persuasion to be studied by us now. Private members also may do much to promote the success of the system by impressing their brethren with the importance of a strict conformity to it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RULE IS OPEN TO NO VALID OBJECTIONS.

OBJECTIONS and difficulties might easily be alleged against the plan of the Apostle. But not one occurs to me which weighs with any valid force against it; *not one that would not have been equally valid at Corinth or in Galatia*. Nor am I sufficiently convinced that good would be accomplished by their statement and refutation to justify me in undertaking the work.

But for two formidable obstacles, existing, alas! to how great an extent even among those whom we must, in charity, recognize as Christians, a speedy adoption of the Apostolical rule throughout the churches might be anticipated. These obstacles are Covetousness and Indolence. COVETOUSNESS, that recoils at the very thought of levying on itself a tax for religion,—be it never so small—so often as once a week; INDOLENCE, that finds almost equal difficulty in rousing itself to a noble resolve, and in carrying out with punctuality and perseverance the determination it has formed.

Many who readily acknowledge, in general terms, their duty to do good, and who contribute

more or less for the aid of good objects, do not recognize as they ought the extent to which it is intended by God, that money shall be employed in prosecuting the labors assigned to his church. Some become impatient as the oft-recurring and importunate cry for help falls upon their ears; and even insinuate that Christian benevolence itself is coming to be mixed up with a great deal that is sordid and mercenary. But God has nevertheless so ordered it in his providence, that little shall be done without a liberal consecration of resources on the part of his people. Ought we not to rejoice that it is so?

Ought not the reflection to gladden our hearts, that *money is yet to bless the world, even more than it has hitherto cursed it*. Why should any one be shocked to hear that the Lord hath need of it? Money is a noble element of power,—only prostituted when made the minister of sin; and never so appropriately employed as when doing the work of God in subserving the spiritual elevation of our race. The Lord has required it in every age. At what a pecuniary outlay did the ancient people of God support their ritual observances! And read the New Testament—asking, ‘For what purpose has God given me property, or the ability to acquire it?’ Weigh well the meaning of these words of Christ—“Ye cannot serve God and mam-

mon.” “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.” Mark, throughout the Bible, how exceeding great and precious are the promises made to the liberal; how numerous, how awful, and how aggravated the woes denounced on the covetous; and the many rich illustrations afforded of the truth, that “the Lord loveth a cheerful giver.” He who pretends to take the Scriptures for his guide, may, with quite as much consistency, deny that the gold and silver are the Lord’s, as retain or disburse them irrespective of the Lord’s service.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RULE HAS MANY INCIDENTAL ADVANTAGES.

THE inherent advantages of the plan have been brought out so fully in the course of its exposition, that nothing further need be added in relation to them. But there are many *incidental* benefits which might appropriately be noticed. I can barely touch on two of them.

The first and most obvious is—*there will be an abundance of means for carrying on the labors of christian benevolence.* This is a great desideratum. For in no department of these labors has the supply hitherto been more than an exceedingly stinted one. The want of such a system as the primitive one, has left many a poor sufferer to languish unrelieved under the very eaves of our sanctuaries; has bereft many a pulpit of an efficient minister; and has deprived not a few neighborhoods of even a pulpit. Into many a benighted district of our land the colporteur has never yet penetrated; and hardly a green spot has been reclaimed from the wastes of heathenism that has not at times seemed likely to relapse into its former condition for want of a due reinforcement of laborers. The

Executive Boards of our various Societies, at the very meetings in which they are informed of the glorious results of the operations they are directing, and are urged to turn their eyes to new fields all white for the harvest—crippled by debt, and despairing of timely relief, are compelled rather to inquire—‘At what point can we the least disastrously curtail what we are doing?’ Meantime, the appeals of the press and the solicitations of agents—self-denying, useful brethren, whose services cannot yet be dispensed with, and of whom I would never speak but with respect—are fast becoming more than thrice-told tales; while, in a vast number of instances, local auxiliary societies have become almost literally “trees without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.”

Little further is to be hoped from temporary expedients. Nothing short of a permanent conviction, that Christ has required his people to be associated together and organized in the church capacity, *for the very purpose* of aggression on the kingdom of darkness, with corresponding action, will meet the emergency. What—unless the churches come to act more from the steady impulse of inward principle, and according to some fixed, judicious, effective system—what can be anticipated but the gradual abandonment of the enterprises in which they are embarked? God forbid that that day—

may rather, that blackest night of guilt and vengeance, should ever settle over the churches of America! Brethren, can we believe it will? The churches of America are able to meet every demand; and the pleasing vision steals over me of the time when all—ministers and people, young and old, rich and poor—shall have roused themselves with one accord to duty; and, developing their means by a rigid practice of the primitive rule, shall give a generous response to every reasonable claim; when the good Samaritan shall carry his ready succor to every habitation of distress; and “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” “Then God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.”

The other benefit to which I would refer, relates to *the contributor himself*. To every one of his children, Jehovah has said—“If riches increase, set not thine heart upon them.” The systematic and constant calls which the Mosaic laws made for the surrender of property, were doubtless designed to preclude this evil; and, under the Gospel, God had a similar design in demanding that *all* be consecrated to his service. It is no less in love to his people than in justice to himself, that he has caused this note of warning to sound out from his word. How sad a deformity is avarice in the

character of a Christian! How odious in the eyes of all the good, alike in heaven and on earth!

Behold the miser, gloating and shriveling over his hoard! What Christian starts not back with the prayer—‘Lord, stay my foot from its first step towards that!’ Well is Covetousness branded as idolatry; for, *where this reigns, God is not God*. The root of pure religion is wanting. The place that the Most High demands is held by Mammon. Surely, genuine piety, instead of being compatible with the growth of such a principle, must naturally lead to its utter extirpation.

Yet it cannot be concealed, that with increasing years and increasing wealth, there commonly comes a lamentable tendency to be more and more insatiable in getting, and more and more tenacious in our grasp of what we have acquired. Such is the force of habit, that this will inevitably be the case unless special means are taken to prevent the result. It makes little difference how praiseworthy our employments are in themselves; this tendency must be counteracted, or the mischief will be incurred. How ought this fact to arrest the attention of the young especially, who would grow up to characters of substantial Christian excellence, and have their paths like the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day! What true child of God can regard with composure the danger

of clinging the more closely to the world, the nearer he gets to his Father's house!

How shall this tendency be counteracted? Only by means in their nature suited to this effect. The only way to avoid being miserly is, not to *act* like a miser. The only way to be generous is, to *do* generously. We shall not be beneficent until habit, co-operating with piety, has made the practice of beneficence the cheerful prompting of our hearts, and caused it to be with us *a thing of course*. And how shall the habit ever come to exist, except as a result of the *frequent, regular, systematic doing of the thing*, from regard to principle, and irrespective of any gratification it may afford us?

Now, let all of you, my brethren, who really aspire after "the highest style of man," decide whether this process does not point directly to the Apostolical rule, and characterize it as just what is needed in this department of Christian training. It is not possible for any one, actuated by the motives of the Gospel, to adhere to that rule for any considerable time, without achieving conquests over the gross and degrading servitude of self, and finding that there is, in truth, a luxury in doing good. He may have much to contend with at the outset; but let him persevere! God will honor his resolute determination, and dispatch to him aids by which he shall grow in beneficence, and

every grace; and exhibit, at once, a bright example of the ennobling power of active, self-denying piety, and a clear demonstration of the truth, that “the liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.”

I have thus laid before you what appears to me to be the best possible mode of benevolent action. Far be it from me to throw any suggestions in the way of any plan which has more to recommend it. But all through this effort to reform, by returning to the Primitive Rule of Giving, I have been painfully oppressed with the apprehension that not a few who have neither a better plan, nor any plan at all, will drop the subject, when I have done, and think no more of the matter. I fancy I hear one and another saying to himself—‘The system may be a very good one for *most* persons; but *my* circumstances are so peculiar that it will not answer for me.’ And another is saying—‘I do enough in my present way; if every Christian would be as liberal as I, a plenty of money would be raised.’ And still another is saying—‘I like the plan, and am *inclined to think* I will adopt it.’ Dear brethren and sisters in Christ, who of you will take the noble stand, and say—I WILL ADOPT IT. Not

another Sabbath shall pass without my laying by me in store for the service of the Lord; and, with the help of divine grace, as long as God shall give me the ability, I will continue my weekly appropriations. Moreover my *influence* shall not be wanting, in any way in which it can be exerted, to induce all who love our Lord Jesus Christ to go and do likewise.'

APPENDIX.

EXAMPLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

EVERY man who faithfully adopts this divine system of giving, lives a new Christian life, and enters on a course in which he will wax stronger and stronger both in personal piety and in benevolence. The system has been briefly expressed in the form of a pledge or covenant, hereto annexed, in the adoption of which substantially, great numbers have found a rich blessing.

A SHOEMAKER being asked how he contrived to give so much, replied, that it was easily done by obeying St. Paul's precept in 1 Cor. xvi. 2. "Upon the first day of the week let every one lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." "I earn," said he, "one day with another, about a dollar a day, and I can, without inconvenience to myself or family, lay by five cents of this sum for charitable purposes: the amount, is thirty cents a week. My wife takes in sewing and washing, and earns something like two dollars a week, and she lays by ten cents of that. My children each of them earn a shilling or two, and are glad to contribute their penny; so that altogether we *lay by us in store* forty cents a week. And if we have been unusually prospered, we contribute something more. The weekly amount is depo-

sited every Sunday morning in a box kept for that purpose, and reserved for future use. Thus, by these small earnings, we have learned that it is more blessed to give than to receive. The yearly amount saved in this way is about *twenty-five dollars*; and I distribute this among the various benevolent societies, according to the best of my judgment."

A CLERGYMAN every Sabbath evening sets apart a portion of his charity fund. If at any time he has not the money, he credits the sum on a benevolent account. As calls are presented, he draws from this fund; and if an urgent call at any time requires more than he has thus set apart, he charges the balance on his benevolent account, to be replaced from future incomes. Thus his contributions are identified with his own enjoyment of religion and growth in grace; he gives "not grudgingly," but of "a willing mind;" applications for charity are met with pleasure; and he feels that in all he receives and expends, he is acting as a steward of God. He has also secured the adoption of the system by his congregation, with very encouraging success.

Some, who have little money at command, who keep few accounts, and who live mainly on the yearly products of the ground they cultivate, or other fruits of their industry, judge that they conform to the spirit of the divine rule by giving at *longer stated periods* of such things as they have. One statedly consecrates a certain proportion of the products of his farm; another of mechanical labor; another of the needle, or other domestic industry—every one using his Christian liberty in giving

statedly as he sees best in his own circumstances, according "as God prospers him."

Others, engaged in merchandise and extensive business transactions, accustomed to taking a stated inventory of what they possess, familiar with accounts and percentages of profit and loss, not knowing every Sabbath what has been the income of the week, have found great satisfaction and a blessing in *determining beforehand* what portion of all the proceeds of their business, they will monthly, or quarterly, or yearly devote to benevolence; and some have resolved on a percentage to be statedly given, and diminished, or increased, in proportion as God shall prosper them.

A MERCHANT, in answer to inquiries, refers back to a period, when, he says, "In consecrating my life anew to God, aware of the ensnaring influence of riches, and the necessity of deciding on a plan of charity, before wealth should bias my judgment, I adopted the following system.

"I decided to balance my accounts, as nearly as I could, every month; and reserving such portion of profits as might appear adequate to cover probable losses, to lay aside, by entry on a benevolent account, *one-tenth* of the remaining profits, great or small, as a fund for benevolent expenditure, supporting myself and family on the remaining nine-tenths. I further determined, that if at any time my net profits, that is, profits from which clerk-hire and store expenses had been deducted, should exceed \$500 in a month, I would give twelve and

a half per cent. ; if over \$700, fifteen per cent. ; if over \$900, seventeen and a half per cent. ; if over \$1,100, twenty per cent. ; if over \$1,300, twenty two and a half per cent. ; thus increasing the proportion of the whole, as God should prosper, until, at \$1,500, I should give twenty-five per cent., or \$375 a month. As capital was of the utmost importance to my success in busines, I decided not to increase the foregoing scale until I had acquired a certain capital, after which I would give one-quarter of all net profits, great or small ; and on the acquisition of another certain amount of capital, I decided to give *half*, and on acquiring what I determined would be a full sufficiency of capital, then to give *the whole* of my net profits.

“It is now several years since I adopted this plan, and under it I have acquired a handsome capital, and have been prospered beyond my most sanguine expectations. Although constantly giving, I have never yet touched the bottom of my fund, and have repeatedly been surprised to find what large drafts it would bear. True, during some months I have encountered a salutary trial of faith, when this rule has led me to lay by the tenth while the remainder proved inadequate to my support ; but the tide has soon turned, and with gratitude I have recognized a heavenly hand more than making good all past deficiencies.

“This system has been of great advantage to me to feel that my life is directly employed for God. It has afforded me happiness in enabling me to portion out the Lord’s money, and has enlisted my mind more in the progress of Christ’s cause. Happy privilege, which the humblest may enjoy, of thus associating the common labors of life with the grateful service of the Saviour,

and of making that which naturally leads the heart *from* God, subserve the highest spiritual good.

“This system has saved me from commercial dangers, by leading me to simplify business and avoid extensive credits. It has made me a better merchant; for the monthly pecuniary observations which I have been wont to take, though often quite laborious, have brought me to a better knowledge of the state of my affairs, and led me to be more cautious and prudent than I otherwise should have been. I believe this system tends to enlarge the Christian’s views, increase his disinterestedness, and lead him to shun the tricks of trade. My own observation also confirms the belief, that even warm-hearted Christians *must determine beforehand* on the system they adopt, if they will secure the benefits of the gospel plan to themselves, under the grace and providence of God, or its happy results to the cause of Christ.”

God has appointed no means of extensive usefulness which does not involve the self-denying and persevering exertions of his people; and if this divine system is to be generally adopted, it is essential that pastors of churches and public men, to whom others look for example and counsel, should first themselves put it in practice, and then commend it to others, and help them to form wise plans to render it practically efficient. Especially should all do this who are engaged in any way in raising funds, or collecting for benevolent objects. Every one who is brought to understand the power and efficiency of this system, is bound to spread it among all within the reach of his influence.

EXAMPLE OF NATHANIEL R. COBB,

A MEMBER OF THE THIRD BAPTIST CHURCH, BOSTON.



SOME notice of Mr. Cobb in this connection is due to his memory. The interests of the church also require that his example should be held up for imitation. He taught us how, by the grace of God, A CHRISTIAN MERCHANT can live; and he has shown us how such a man can die.

Mr. Cobb resolved at the commencement of his religious life, that he would serve the Saviour with all his power, in that sphere which seemed to be particularly assigned to him. He had not an opportunity to acquire extensive learning, and he could not serve the Church, to any considerable extent, by his voice or pen. But God had endowed him with very unusual talent for business.

Hence, he justly regarded his talent for business, as an instrument which he ought to employ for the glory of his Saviour. He felt it to be his duty to use it in earning money for the cause of God, on precisely the same principle, that it is the duty of the minister to devote his talents for preaching to the service of the Lord Jesus. He accordingly,

in November, 1821, at the age of twenty-three, drew up and subscribed the following very remarkable document:

“By the grace of God I will never be worth more than \$50,000.

“By the grace of God I will give *one-fourth* of the nett profits of my business to charitable and religious uses.

“If I am ever worth \$20,000, I will give *one-half* of my nett profits; and if I am ever worth \$30,000, I will give *three-fourths*, and *the whole* after \$50,000. So help me God, or give to a more faithful steward, and set me aside.

November, 1821.

N. R. COBB.

To this covenant he adhered with conscientious fidelity. He distributed the profits of his business, with an increasing ratio, from year to year, till he reached the point which he had fixed as a limit of his property, and then he gave to the cause of God all the money which he earned. At one time, finding that his property had increased beyond \$50,000, he at once devoted the surplus, \$7,500, as a foundation for a Professorship in the Newton Theological Institution; to which, we may add, he gave, on various occasions, during his life, at least twice that sum.

Mr. Cobb did not wait till he had acquired \$50,000, before he began to devote his money to

religious uses. It was indeed, while he was yet young, and comparatively a poor man, recently established in business, that he resolved to give *one-fourth* of the nett proceeds of his business to benevolent purposes. It was then uncertain what would be his success ; but he felt it to be his duty to begin then, with the resolution to increase the proportion, if God should prosper him. There are many Christians who think that if they could accumulate a certain sum, they would then be generous. They say, that they must first make provision for themselves and their families, and then they will distribute their money liberally. Mr. Cobb did not act thus. He, from the beginning, gave a large proportion of his income, and trusted in God that whatever should be necessary for himself and his family, would be supplied.

He was a generous friend to many young men, whom he assisted in establishing themselves in business. A friend says, "Above all other distinguishing traits in his character, as a man of business, was his willingness to assist those who were unfortunate, or were industriously climbing slowly up. Nothing seemed to give him more pleasure, than to see such persons prospering and rising in the world. He was always prompt; and I have often heard him reprove others by saying, 'My way is, never to leave a thing, till it is *finished*.'"

The services of Mr. Cobb, as a member of numerous benevolent societies, were highly valuable. He was ready to aid all wise designs which seemed to have a claim on him, as a Christian, a philanthropist, and a patriot. While, therefore, he was the Treasurer of the Massachusetts Sabbath School Union; while he gave at least \$1000 to the Baptist General Tract Society; while he was an active member of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions; the EDUCATION CAUSE was, in his judgment, the main-spring of our whole system of means. To this cause he was principally devoted.

He always felt that God had bestowed on him a rich blessing, in enabling him thus to serve His cause. On his death-bed, he said to a friend, in allusion to the resolutions quoted above,—“By the grace of God—*nothing else*—by the grace of God, I have been enabled, under the influence of those resolutions, to give away more than \$40,000. How good the Lord has been to me!”

The last days of Mr. Cobb's life were brightened by Christian hope. While he was able to converse, he expressed his humble, yet firm reliance on the Redeemer. He spoke, with grateful joy, of the Saviour's love and faithfulness, and of his desire to depart and be with Christ. He said, “It is indeed a glorious thing to die. I have been active and busy in the world—I have enjoyed

it as much as any one—God has prospered me—I have everything to tie me here—I am happy in my family—I have property enough—but how small and mean does this world appear, when we are on a sick bed! Nothing can equal my enjoyment in the near view of heaven.—My hope in Christ is worth infinitely more than all other things. The blood of Christ, the blood of Christ—NONE but Christ!—I think I can say with brother Lincoln, should I live to the age of Methuselah, I don't think I should ever find a better time to die."

A short time before his death, he said to his wife, "If any thing shall be put on my coffin, let it be these words, '*Christ is my hope.*'" This was accordingly done.

Mr. Cobb acted on a settled plan. He had established a principle, and he adhered to it. His benevolence was not an occasional overflow at the impulse of excitement. It was a steady stream. He was strongly convinced that his plan was the best one, and he advised others to adopt it. He would not trust to his feelings. He said that he sometimes gave money from principle, when, if he had consulted his feelings alone, he might have withheld it.

All Christians, like him, ought to have a regular plan, and ought to appropriate a definite pro-

portion of their income to the cause of God. It would make them more consistent. Some persons are very liberal at one time, and penurious at another, because they have no plan, and act at the impulse of feelings, which are dependent on health, on the weather, and on a thousand other variable causes. Such a system would increase their means of doing good, because they would regulate their other expenditures with a reference to the consecrated fund. It would add to the pleasure of benevolence, because they would know exactly what they could afford to give, and would feel that they were expending a fund which belonged to the Lord.

*That man may last but never lives,
Who much receives, but nothing gives ;
Whom none can love, whom none can thank,
Creation's blot, creation's blank !*

But he who marks, from day to day,
In generous acts his radiant way,
Treads the same path his Saviour trod,
The path to glory and to God.

SCRIPTURE PLAN OF BENEVOLENCE.

From the Tract entitled "Religion and Beneficence,"

Thus we have traced out the several branches of the duty as taught in the Scriptures: let us now lay them together.

1. It is taught that giving in charity is *essential to true religion*; that every one is as much bound to honor God by his gifts, as he is to pray.

2. Our gifts are required as a means of *our spiritual good and growth in grace*, as the discipline to form us to a beneficent character.

3. Our gifts must be *free-will offerings*, and must be made according to a system that gives scope to the utmost freedom.

4. We must regulate them in our judgment according to *the ability which God gives us*.

5. They must be made at *stated periods*.

6. They must be made *in connection with our acts of worship*.

All these separate branches of the duty we find scattered through the Scriptures. Then, in the order given by Paul to the Corinthians, we find them all

joined and compacted together in one condensed formula, as follows :

“ Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.”

These few words embrace every branch of the duty stated above. The first is involved in that the order runs to *every one*. The second, in that the deposits are to be made, not merely to meet emergencies and particular calls for them, but in a way to work our spiritual discipline and growth in grace. The third and fourth, in that the amount to be given is referred to each one's own judgment of the ability which God has given. The fifth and sixth, in acting on this subject on the first day of the week.

Here then we have, from an inspired pen, the whole duty reduced to the simplest form and the shortest compass. Here is the *multum in parvo*—a compact compendium of all scripture on this subject, yet intelligible to the merest child, and sufficient for the man of the most extensive and complex business. It requires that each one on every Sabbath, set apart what he thinks he ought, in view of the prosperity which God gives him ; thus creating a fund devoted to God, out of which he shall meet the calls for charity when they come. This does not require the deposits to be made

always in money. They may be made in such fruits of labor as the donor has; or, when ready money is not at hand, by entering it on an account kept with our charity treasury.

With this condensation of all the duty in one simple rule, we have something to propose, which is as definite and simple as it is important; or rather, we bring God's proposal to our fellow-Christian, or fellow-sinner, in a very simple and intelligible form. We do not say, "You must be generous to the poor," or, "You must give such and such a portion of your income;" but we say, "Begin now, and continue a course of action on the line which the scriptures have so clearly drawn." We propose not a particular gift, but the beginning of a well-defined course, that cannot fail to educate the heart and conscience to the love of giving, and therefore to generous gifts. In this simple rule and the habit of action formed under it, you have a trellis-work of divine construction, on which your beneficence is gradually to lift itself up, spread abroad its branches, and bring forth its clusters.

MOTIVES TO ADOPT THIS PLAN.

1. The first of these is, that *it brings our work of charity within the Sabbath*, causes our gifts to be weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, and our "prayers and alms" to go up together "as a

memorial before God." It calls the mind to act on this subject when most susceptible; when disburdened of worldly cares; when most free from aspirations for worldly gains; when most engaged in contemplating the mercies of God, and the obligations resulting therefrom to make returns of love. It brings in substantial acts of love to God and man to modify our devotions. *So in effect the temple of our worship, like that of the Jews, has a Lord's treasury in it, to which we bring our grateful offerings while engaged in joyous celebration of the new creation in Christ; testifying our grateful joy in acts, as well as words and songs.* Gifts are the most natural language of a grateful heart, and they mingle well with praise for redeeming love. Yea, they are as natural a medium of the soul's communion with God as prayer.

2. There is a great advantage in *the frequent repetition* of the act, secured under this rule. If, as often as the Sabbath comes, the mind is called to exercise itself in a gift of property to God, or his poor, there must be more exercise of heart, a greater amount of thought and feeling about charity, than if we gave even in larger sums at longer intervals. And it is the thought and feeling that plough wider channels for the outflow of benevolence. It is the continual dropping that wears the stone. Hence, if any find it somewhat inconvenient to

make the periods of their gifts short as the weeks, it deserves to be considered whether the advantage in self-discipline will not more than overbalance the inconvenience. Be that as it may, any reflecting mind will discern great wisdom in that which holds us to periodical acts, that tend to our discipline in heavenly charity.

3. The provision *that a charity treasury shall be kept, into which the gifts shall be made before they are called to be given out*, works important results upon the mind. It facilitates our doing the work "heartily, as unto the Lord." It turns the direction of our gifts first to him. If we give for charity when there is no distinct solicitation nor object of charity before the mind, God himself is near us as the object of the gift. Our reference to him is likely to be more distinct, than if some case of human distress stood between us and him. What havoc would be made of the piety of the church by annihilating all system, all regulated habits in prayer! But who can say that we are not suffering proportionally as much by our want of system in this other branch of spiritual religion? If our benevolence be left so much to casual impulses, it will undoubtedly remain at a low-water mark.

4. This provision *secures the advantages of beneficence to every one, if he will*. "Let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered

him." This assures us that God will look with equal favor on the small gifts of the poor and the large donations of the rich : and nothing in fact is more needed to move the masses of the church to action than this. He who has "chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom," will neither crush them with the burdens of his cause, nor exclude them from a share in its progress and triumphs. When weighing the widow's farthing-gift against princely donations, he struck the balance in its favor because it had more heart in it; because, being attended with more sacrifices, it secured more sanctified affection, which is the true value of all gifts.

Here, "the rich and the poor meet together" on a common level before God, in a work that carries blessings forth and back—blesses him that gives and him that takes. It makes your cent a week, if you can give no more, a means of an interchange of holy affections with Christ, a means of the enlargement of your heart and your sympathies for a dying world. And perhaps that single cent, wet with your tears, followed by your prayers, sent to its place by the partial hand of Him who so valued a widow's farthing, hits its mark with greater force than whole talents of gold from other hands. A single penny tract has had now and then a history, more to be coveted than some of the proudest pro-

ductions of genius. And who can say that that tract, which has lighted here and there a fire that is destined to spread and burn, none can tell how far—yea, has generated a train of light that has already gone widening and brightening round the world—was not sent on its mission by the hard-earned and prayer-embalmed gift of some poverty-stricken child of God?

5. The adoption of the rule in a given church may be followed at first by no marked increase; for *its power lies in forming and bringing to bear the settled habits* which must have time to form. As fast as it forms these habits, it extends the sources of an enduring power. Great complaints are heard, that a large portion of the members of our churches wholly refrain from gifts for evangelizing. True, it is not the poor alone who are thus remiss. But if the number who are so, could be reduced, by the stated gifts of all who have been deterred from giving by a discouragement which this rule, well considered, would remove, it might be hoped the others would come into the work. Any plan of raising supplies, that discourages the small gifts of the poor, cuts its own sinews. Our worlds must be made by the aggregation of atoms. And the rule under consideration works admirably in this view; generating funds where there are none, gathering a thick and pregnant

cloud and drenching showers, from exhalations too thin to be visible.

With admirable flexibility the rule bends to all variety of cases. It commits us not for the future to any amount, but asks us to give only according to a prosperity already experienced, the income of the last week. It names no fixed percentage which each one must give, but leaves him to judge, in view of all his circumstances, how much he ought to give. He may, if he will, resolve to give such and such a percentage, as Jacob did; but in this he is determined not by this divine rule itself, but by his own judgment of what is right in his own case.

6. Action under this rule secures the impulse and growth of our benevolence *to come from the most spiritual and evangelical motives*. Paul did not make the fact that somebody will suffer if we do not give, the main reason for our giving, and thus leave the main-spring untouched. He did not rely on the energy and eloquence of Agents giving the statistics, and a panorama of the world lying in wickedness, and from these appealing to natural sympathies; but he took hold of an order of motives capable of rousing the whole energy of the heart. The plan which Paul struck out, though it required agents to *commence* operations under it, left little for agents permanently to do.

He did not say, Wait till I, or some other agent, come, and give you the thrilling details of the suffering saints; but, "Let there be no gatherings when I come."

7. Every Christian ought to enter into the habit of systematic beneficence, under this divine rule, in order to qualify himself to do what he can *to remedy one of the greatest deficiencies in the present habits and action of the church.* There is a general conviction that the church is not doing what she can and ought; and, if we are not mistaken, the neglected source of the needed efficiency is in this heaven-appointed rule. If God has appointed action under this rule to be the great means of forming a benevolent character, will it not be unformed, where this rule is so much neglected? The remedy lies in a restoration of this rule of action. As well might the churches of the continent of Europe, where the Sabbath is to so great an extent lost, expect to recover the blessings of the Sabbath without a reënthronement of the divine law of the Sabbath, and conforming their practice to it.

While existing modes of thought and feeling prevail on this subject, we can hardly expect that future revivals will greatly raise the standard of beneficence; the piety of future converts will be cast in the existing moulds.

But if this rule is what we conceive it to be, a compend of the whole duty of beneficence—the divinely chosen instrument of forming benevolent character—it is to be the grand instrument of effecting the needed revolution in the habits of the church. As soon as you have gained the consent of one individual to act under it, you have secured the revolution in that one instance. You have gained, not simply another hand to give now and then so much, but another heart to come under a training to steady and expansive beneficence. You have brought the remedy to the very root of one of the greatest diseases of the church. You take those just initiated into the first principles, and teach them the alphabet, and put them forward in a divinely-appointed course. The mass of Christians cannot be brought up to their duty but by *training*, by action under such a specific rule. For this end you have this rule given of God, intelligible to the merest child, suited to the use of all. And as fast as you multiply persons acting under it, you throng the way to that consummation, when every church lesser or larger, every family rich or poor, shall be a generous source of supply to our grand schemes of beneficence.

While the fields of the world are white for the harvest, and money raised can be turned to so rich account, and yet while so many in the church are

giving nothing, and so many others are giving so little, we naturally seek to reach the public conscience through some untravelled approaches. And here they are. Go to any Christian, and convince him that God requires him to act under this inspired rule of the Apostle, and you lay a grasp on his conscience which it has never before felt. All count themselves to some degree benevolent, and all general exhortations to benevolence are taken as running in the line of their own present practice. But ask one to do this thing in this way, and you make a new proposal. Convince him that God requires it of him, and engage him to commence and proceed under the auspices of his own enlightened conscience, and you have put him in the path that leads surely on to a whole-souled benevolence. Then let it be seen that this rule is entering into the common sense and practice of the church; let the common Christian life embrace it, and hold it forth as binding on all; let it be seen that the neglect of this rule sets aside a substantive law of divine life, as really as would the neglect of daily prayer, or the profanation of the Sabbath—then will you reach the public conscience with new power. Let all Christians, by word and deed, contribute to give this apostolic rule the force of a living command of God—let it live and breathe through the common Christian prac-

tice, and soon all who profess to be Christ's will be in the practice of it.

Here then is proposed for adoption a rule of duty involving our highest interest and usefulness, imposed by divine authority, and leading to the richest results. If any feel that they need no rule of beneficent action, because they intend no such action, they must be left to the final reckoning, with the simple admonition that God's great scheme of beneficence never can embrace those whom it does not penetrate and make beneficent. But all who mean to act on the principle, that it is "the merciful" who "shall obtain mercy," will find intrinsic excellence and manifold advantages in action under this rule,—will find from experience that they cannot well live without it.



PLEDGE OR COVENANT.

Believing that the Scripture system of benevolence requires every one statedly to "lay by him in store as God hath prospered him," I engage, on every Sabbath, or at other stated periods, to set apart such a portion of what God shall give me, as my judgment and conscience shall dictate; to be sacredly applied to charitable objects, according to my sense of their respective claims.

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